

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**December 13, 2009**

**Prophets Foreshadow Messiah's Birth**

Isaiah 7:13-17 & Luke 1:30-38

**Key verse: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14)**

Talk show host Larry King was asked, "If you could select any one person across all of history to interview, who would it be?" King answered that the one person above all that he would choose to interview would be Jesus Christ.

"And what would you like to ask him?"

Larry King replied, "I would like to ask him if he was indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me." (Ravi Zacharias, "Questions I Would Like to Ask God")

It is Christmas time again, and we are reminded of Christ's miraculous birth, His divine nature, and the atoning work on the cross for which Jesus came. These truths about Christ are at the heart of our faith. In most United Methodist churches, we profess our faith in the words of "The Apostles' Creed," which says of Jesus Christ that He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit" and "born of the Virgin Mary."

Based on the testimony of Scripture, the Church has historically held that Christ's conception was the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Born as a baby in Bethlehem, God the Son—the eternal second Person of the Trinity—came to live in human flesh. As John writes, "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). From His conception and birth, so the Church has held, Jesus Christ was "fully God and fully man."

Karl Barth, one of the world's greatest theologians, has said: "no one can dispute the existence of a biblical testimony to the Virgin Birth" (*Church Dogmatics, I,2, p.176*). Luke 1:30-38, one of our Scripture lessons for this week, provides a clear testimony to Jesus' Virgin Birth. When the angel tells Mary that she will conceive a son, to be called "the Son of the Most High," Mary asks: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (v. 34). The angel answers Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God" (v. 35).

This week's lesson also looks at Isaiah 7:13-17. This passage, too, refers to a special birth and a special sign. In its immediate context, King Ahaz is facing the imminent invasion of Judah (Israel's southern kingdom). Isaiah prophesies that God

is going to give a “sign” of God’s presence in the face of this threat: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Bible scholars differ on the translation of the Hebrew word which the New Revised Standard version translates here as “young woman.” Other Bible translations say “virgin” rather than “young woman.” So, what is happening in Isaiah 7, and how does it relate to what happened as recorded in Luke 1?

Perhaps the best explanation is that, in its immediate context, Isaiah speaks of a child to be born in his time that would be a sign that God is with Judah and with King Ahaz. However, it was not uncommon for Old Testament prophecy to describe *both* a contemporary event and an event in the distant future. In this case, Isaiah’s prophecy, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is also a foreshadowing of Jesus’ birth.

Matthew clearly saw this prophetic foreshadowing when he wrote of Jesus’ miraculous conception and birth: “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us’” (Matthew 1:22-23).

Reinforcing the view that Isaiah 7:14 is a prophecy about Jesus’ birth is the fact that a neighboring passage, Isaiah 9:6, provides one of the great messianic prophecies in the Old Testament: “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

So, we stand again on the threshold of Christmas. As followers of Christ, we will add our testimony to that of the Church universal: God has come in human flesh—to bear our burdens, to cancel our sins, to light the way to life abundant and eternal. Jesus has come—our Emmanuel, “God with us.”

Charles Wesley, the great Methodist hymn writer, helps us to sing it:

*Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord;  
late in time behold him come, off-spring of a virgin’s womb;  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail th’incarnate Deity,  
pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.  
Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”*

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